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FOR G - BISA WILLIAMS-MANIGAULT

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SUBJECT: PEACE CORPS: VIEWS OF AMBASSADORS: TUNIS RESPONSE

REF: STATE 24652

¶1. PEACE CORPS? WE LOVED THEM--AND TUNISIA LOVED THEM--FOR THE CONTRIBUTIONS TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT THE 2,382 AMERICANS AND THEIR THOUSANDS OF TUNISIAN COUNTERPARTS MADE DURING THE 34 YEARS OF THEIR COMMON ENDEAVOR TO IMPROVE THE HUMAN CONDITION. TUNISIA HAS ATTAINED A LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT THAT PRECLUDES OUR CONTINUING TO FUND A PEACE CORPS PROGRAM HERE NOW; THE PEACE CORPS FORMALLY LEFT TUNISIA ON AUGUST 23, 1996.

¶2. FITTED TO THE THREE GUIDELINE QUESTIONS OF REFTEL PARAGRAPH 4.ARE SEVERAL EXTRACTS AND PARAPHRASES OF SOME OF THE MATERIALS PRESENTED IN THE BROCHURE "PEACE CORPS TUNISIA - THE LEGACY - 1962-1996" PREPARED HERE (AND IN WASHINGTON) TO COMMEMORATE THE PROGRAM AT THE END OF ITS MISSION. WE HAVE ADDED A FOURTH CATEGORY AT THE END OF THIS MESSAGE: THE CONTRIBUTION FORMER PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS BRING HOME WITH THEM.

¶3. ITEM A.L: THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS THAT PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS...HAVE PREVIOUSLY MADE:

"TUNISIA WAS ONLY FIVE YEARS INTO ITS NATIONHOOD WHEN PRESIDENT HABIB BOURGUIBA CAME TO THE UNITED STATES IN MAY 1961. AS THE FIRST HEAD OF STATE TO VISIT NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENT KENNEDY, ONE OF THE FIRST ITEMS ON BOURGUIBA'S AGENDA WAS THE PEACE CORPS. PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA HAD ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AND TUNISIA AS REFORM-ORIENTED AND FORWARD-MOVING BY PLACING A HIGH PRIORITY ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS, EDUCATION, AND EMPLOYMENT. AT THIS FIRST HISTORIC MEETING, BOURGUIBA ASKED PRESIDENT KENNEDY FOR AMERICA'S HELP IN FULFILLING THE GOALS OF HIS AMBITIOUS PLANS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

"TUNISIA BECAME THE FIRST ARAB COUNTRY TO REQUEST AND RECEIVE PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS. ENTRY INTO TUNISIA WAS GROUND BREAKING AND IT WOULD HELP PAVE THE WAY FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS TO WORK IN MANY OTHER NATIONS OF NORTH AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST, AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD. MUCH OF THE EXPERIENCE IN LANGUAGE TRAINING AND CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING FIRST GAINED IN TUNISIA WOULD GO ON TO HELP THE PEACE CORPS PREPARE AND TRAIN VOLUNTEERS FOR WORK IN COUNTRIES SUCH AS MOROCCO, OMEN, YEMEN, IRAN, AFGHANISTAN, UZBEKISTAN, KAZAKHSTAN, THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC, AND TURKMENISTAN."

¶4. PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS ASSIGNED TO TUNISIA HAD TASKS AS VARIED AS ANY IN THE WORLD. THE INITIAL GROUPS OF PCVS IN TUNIS INCLUDED:

- ARCHITECTS, TOWN PLANNERS, AND CITY SUPERVISORS, WHO WORKED ON THE COASTAL TOWNS OF SOUSSE AND MONASTIR;
- JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS, WHO TAUGHT MORE THAN 50,000 TUNISIAN STUDENTS IN THE FOLLOWING 16 YEARS;
- YOUTH SPECIALISTS, WHO ADDRESSED NEEDS IN THE FIELDS OF SPORTS, EDUCATION, AND NURSING, INCLUDING ONE WHO WAS APPOINTED ASSISTANT COACH

OF THE NATIONAL BASKETBALL TEAM;

- HOSPITAL AND CLINIC-BASED NURSES, FOCUSSED ON EDUCATING NEW MOTHERS, FAMILY PLANNING, NUTRITION, HEALTH EDUCATION, WATER AND SANITATION; AND
- MECHANICS, FISHERIES AND AGRICULTURAL SPECIALISTS, WHO PROVIDED VOCATIONAL TRAINING AT TECHNICAL CENTERS, MARINE FISHERIES, AND TAUGHT FARMING METHODS, BEEKEEPING, AND TREE PLANTING.

IN LATER YEARS, PROGRAMS EXPANDED TO INCLUDE, FOR EXAMPLE:

- ARCHITECTS TEACHING ARCHITECTURE; A SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE WAS OPENED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TUNIS;
- THE GOVT EFFORT TO IMPROVE URBAN HOUSING WAS ASSISTED BY THE PC SELF-HELP HOUSING PROJECT;
- PCVS ENTERED THE SPECIAL EDUCATION CENTER; A SPECIAL OLYMPICS WAS INITIATED; A MODEL TRAINING FACILITY WAS BUILT ON THE ISLAND OF DJERBA--THE FIRST OF ITS KIND; AND
- VIA THE TUNISIAN NATIONAL SPORTS FEDERATION, YOUTH PCVS RETURNED AND INITIATED A YOUTH PROJECT BASED IN RURAL YOUTH CENTERS;

15. ITEM A.2.: EVALUATION OF THE VOLUNTEER'S CONTRIBUTIONS.

THERE FOLLOWS THE TEXT OF A LETTER FROM HIS EXCELLENCY ZINE EL ABIDINE BEN ALI, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA, DATED IN CARTHAGE, AUGUST 23, 1996.

BEGIN TEXT:

LETTER TO THE PEACE CORPS IN TUNISIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE END OF ITS MISSION

ON THE OCCASION OF THE END OF YOUR MISSION IN TUNISIA, IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO EXTEND TO YOU, IN MY NAME AND ON BEHALF OF THE TUNISIAN PEOPLE, MY CONGRATULATIONS AND SINCERE APPRECIATION FOR THE IMPORTANT AND NOBLE SERVICES YOU HAVE PROVIDED DURING YOUR STAY IN TUNISIA, THE LAND OF PEACE AND THE CROSSROAD OF CULTURES AND CIVILIZATIONS THROUGHOUT HISTORY.

SINCE ITS CREATION, THE PEACE CORPS HAS BEEN A GREAT SUCCESS AND HAS ACHIEVED THE NOBLE OBJECTIVES OUTLINED BY PRESIDENT JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1960'S. I AM CONFIDENT THAT YOU HAVE DISCOVERED, THROUGH YOUR MEETING AND DAILY ACTIVITIES IN THE DIFFERENT REGIONS OF OUR COUNTRY, THE HOSPITALITY, THE OPENNESS AND THE TOLERANCE THAT CHARACTERIZE THE TUNISIAN PEOPLE AND HAVE OBSERVED SOME ASPECTS OF THE RICHNESS OF OUR CIVILIZATION AND INCREASED YOUR COMPREHENSION OF THE HABITS AND THE PARTICULARITIES OF OUR COUNTRY. THIS WILL CERTAINLY CONTRIBUTE TO BRINGING THE TUNISIAN AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLES CLOSER TOGETHER. YOUR NOBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIVING CONDITIONS IN SEVERAL REGIONS IN TUNISIA, BY THE COMPLETION OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS, HAVE CERTAINLY ALLOWED YOU TO DEVELOP STRONG TIES AND DEEP RELATIONS WITH TUNISIA AND ITS PEOPLE AND WILL CONTRIBUTE TO STRENGTHENING THE TRADITIONAL RELATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

END TEXT.

16. MANY OF THE VOLUNTEERS WHO SERVED IN TUNISIA

CHOSE NOT TO LIMIT THEMSELVES SOLELY TO THE TASK FOR WHICH THEY WERE INITIALLY SENT, BUT EXPANDED THEIR ENDEAVORS Laterally, thereby also demonstrating a different approach to private enterprise than had previously been utilized by their counterparts. For example, the beekeeper involved himself not only in teaching the care of bees and increasing the honey production, but also in developing lip balm and other beeswax byproducts instead of burning off the combs in winter as had been done previously. He involved the keepers in organizing their own small businesses to market these products. The volunteer who taught clothing construction and other sewing skills to a group of 15-20 girls later found herself devising visual aids to teach her semi-literate students quality control, basic accounting, marketing, and purchasing materials. These girls themselves later found themselves teachers and learned to read and write.

17. ITEM B. RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF PCVS IN FURTHERING U.S. INTERESTS IN TUNISIA

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS INCULCATE AMERICAN SOCIAL VALUES, EDUCATIONAL VALUES, THE WORK ETHIC, COMMUNITY SERVICE, AND SELF-SACRIFICE IN A WAY THAT OUR OTHER AGENCIES' PROGRAMS ARE RARELY ABLE TO ACHIEVE, AND TO A TARGET GROUP OUTSIDE OF THE CAPITAL IN REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY RARELY EXPOSED TO DIRECT CONTACT WITH AMERICANS OR ANY FOREIGNERS.

18. ITEM C. WAYS IN WHICH THE ROLE OF THE PEACE CORPS DIFFERS FROM THE ROLE OF OTHER U.S. GOVERNMENT AGENCIES/PROGRAMS IN TUNISIA

TO PLAGIARIZE THE WORDS OF THE FAMOUS BEER COMMERCIAL, THE PEACE CORPS REFRESHES THE PARTS THAT OTHER PROGRAMS CANNOT REACH. WE SHOULD NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE PEACE CORPS PROGRAM. UNEXPRESSED NEEDS AND HIDDEN LONGINGS MAY HAVE BEEN GIVEN NEW HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT BY THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THE PCVS. BY WHAT THEY WERE, AS MUCH AS BY WHAT THEY DID, OUR VOLUNTEERS DEMONSTRATED AMERICAN IDEALS AND VALUES. THAT UNIVERSITY EDUCATED MEN AND WOMEN WOULD LIVE IN SMALL TOWNS AND ACTUALLY GET THEIR HANDS DIRTY, RATHER THAN SEEK A CUSHY SINECURE WITH THE BUREAUCRACY OR A FAMILY FIRM, MIGHT WELL HAVE BEEN MIND-BOGGLING. SHOCKING THOUGH IT WAS IN 1962-64, ONE WOMAN, PLAYING WITH HER PCV COLLEAGUES ON A PREVIOUSLY ALL-MALE BASKETBALL TEAM, MAY HAVE DONE MORE WITH HER PRESENCE AND THE RESPECT HER TEAMMATES SHOWED HER TO ILLUSTRATE THE CAPABILITIES OF WOMEN THAN A HUNDRED LECTURES ABOUT WOMEN'S RIGHTS COULD HAVE ACCOMPLISHED.

19. ITEM D: THE CONTRIBUTION FORMER PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS BRING HOME WITH THEM

ALTHOUGH YOU HAVE CHOSEN NOT TO CONSIDER THE THIRD GOAL OF THE PEACE CORPS IN THE SCOPE OF THIS CURRENT REQUEST, LET US NOT NEGLECT THE CONTRIBUTION PCVS BRING HOME. MAJOR INTANGIBLE BENEFITS ACCRUE TO US FROM THE MULTIGENERATIONAL IMPACT RETURNING PCVS HAVE HAD AND WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE ON THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF THE UNITED STATES.

DURING THE NEARLY FOUR DECADES SINCE THE INCEPTION OF THE PEACE CORPS, FOREIGN TRAVEL HAS BECOME WIDELY AVAILABLE AND INCREASINGLY EASY AND CHEAP. MILLIONS OF AMERICANS HAVE BROUGHT HOME A GLIB AND FACILE SURFACE FAMILIARITY WITH THE WORLD THAT IS VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM THE PEACE CORPS EXPERIENCE.

PCVS THEMSELVES HAVE BEEN PREDOMINANTLY UNIVERSITY EDUCATED YOUNG ADULTS WHO MAY HAVE TAKEN FOR GRANTED OR HAVE BEEN NEARLY OBLIVIOUS TO THE MULTIPLICITY OF ELEMENTS THAT MAKE UP A SOPHISTICATED AND FREE CIVIL SOCIETY. LIVING WITHOUT A FREE PRESS, A MULTI-PARTY

POLITICAL STRUCTURE, OR TRADE UNIONS COULD HAVE BEEN A SALUTARY EYE OPENER. ON THE OTHER HAND, TO HAVE LEARNED, UP CLOSE AND DIRTY (SOMETIMES DANGEROUSLY SO), THAT

"THERE ARE NINE AND NINETY WAYS
OF CONSTRUCTING TRIBAL LAYS
AND EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM
IS RIGHT"

IS NO MEAN INSIGHT EITHER.

¶10. FINALLY, LET'S NOT FORGET THE CONTINUING ROLE FORMER PCVS PLAY IN FOSTERING IMPROVED TIES BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THEIR FORMER HOST NATION. PCVS, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE HELPED THE AMERICAN-TUNISIAN FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION REMAIN ONE OF THE MOST ACTIVE OF THESE GROUPS IN WASHINGTON. ALL IN ALL, THE PEACE CORPS EXPERIENCE IN TUNISIA WAS WIN-WIN FOR ALL CONCERNED.

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